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U.S.S.R.Scientific/PoliticalMedicine and Health in the Soviet UnionVIII. Medical supplies

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1. Supplies of medicines, medical instruments and apparatus are bad, and quality and quantity varies according to the size of the hospital or medical centre. The largest are given preferential treatment. Highly developed Sulfonamide is only available in the largest centres, and elsewhere there only appear to be four Sulfonamide preparations: Sulfiden, Disulfan, Norsulfasol, and the German preparations Albuzit and Globuzit, Antibiotika supplies have been increased during recent years, and include penicillin, streptomycin, and gramicidin. The fact that these preparations have still to be used sparingly has its good points, when it is remembered that they are used for all sorts of mild complaints in European countries. The Russians have little in the way of drugs for diseases of the heart, blood system, stomach, intestines and liver. The cure-all, which is available in large quantities, is grape sugar.

2. A blood donor organisation is in being, and volunteers have been on the increase in recent years, because they are paid at the rate of 50 Kopeks pro ccm of blood. It is the surgeons' responsibility to examine and grade the blood before he uses it, as this is not done by the collecting centres. This examination has to be thorough because donors are not always tested for syphilis when their services are accepted. Examination according to Rhesus-factor is impossible. Blood serum drugs in large ampules are in short supply, and the number of ready-to-use preparations is low because of the undeveloped state of the Soviet pharmaceutical industry. Among the combined and pure chemical preparations they have pyramidon, aspirin, a caffeine preparation, tannic acid tablets, and vitamins in tablet, pill and ampule form, and for the heart, Digitalis and Strophanthin as tincture and in tablet and ampule form. There are good supplies of camphor. In the narcotics branch, they have ample supplies of sleeping tablets of the Barbitur acid group, and Pantopon and Skopolamin. For narcosis they use ether, chloroform and chlorophyll, and during the last two years, evipan and pernocton. Supplies of bandages and

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dressings in sterilised packing are good, as are supplies of disinfectants for ordinary and surgical use. Ointment with a rather bad base can be obtained from chemists.

3. Surgical instruments are made of bad quality steel which is nickelplated and not stainless steel. They are weak, the plate soon strips off, and the cutting edges of the most precise and sharp instruments are blunt and inaccurate. They do not stand up very well to sterilisation, and after about a hundred operations, need replacing. This of course is not possible, because once a surgeon has obtained a set of instruments, he cannot make exchanges or obtain renewals. Suture material is also of poor quality, and the so-called sterilised packings they are in are ineffective. Because of this, all materials to be used in an operation have to be sterilised in a primitive steam sterilising plant beforehand. Unlimited patience and self control are needed by any surgeon operating with the limited facilities available to him in the Soviet Union. He has to attend to all the minor preparations beforehand, and carefully control the operating theatre staff during the operation, because they are badly trained. In European hospitals, many things connected with operations can be taken for granted, but this certainly does not apply in the Soviet Union. Rubber gloves were in very short supply, and when available, were of poor quality and invariably the cause of constant complaint. Scopien instruments were available, but were usually damaged in transit. The small electric bulbs these instruments require are weak, and about 50-60% of them burn out when they are being used for the first time.

4. It is safe to say that the Russians know what is required, but are not able to produce the quantity or quality which is required in western countries. When one enters a Soviet hospital for the first time, everything appears to be in order, but as soon as one starts to look closely at the material its very poor quality is obvious. This sad state of affairs applies to all instruments used in the medical field, and the performance of operations in the modern way, particularly where broken bones are concerned, is out of the question. Such really good material and personnel as they have is extremely limited, and to be found in a few places only, and the Soviet Union will need many years before it can give modern treatment and reach a standard comparable with that of European countries. The Russians are

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experts at concealing their shortcomings, and visiting Europeans who are only allowed a superficial look at things leave the Soviet Union with an entirely false picture of the situation. Nevertheless, given time, they will eventually achieve western standards, and their task in this respect will be made easier if the western world makes the mistake of delivering medical stores in sufficiently large quantities to them.

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